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ABSTRACT

Many studies, particularly the report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (ICSCP), have tried to define a new world information order for better human understanding. What appears to be needed is the establishment of a new, open-ended, conceptual framework leading to a freer, more efficient, more equitable, better balanced international communication system--one founded on democratic principles and favoring equality in the relations between sovereign states. The new order would be the ideal framework for promoting freedom of information/communication as an individual and collective right that must be guaranteed at all levels. In some respects, development and communication rest on the same principles. In other respects, the new communication order is a prerequisite to the new economic order. The ICSCP has made over 80 recommendations to put this orientation into concrete form. Intended for developing countries, industrialized countries, international institutions, and professional organizations, these recommendations are for implementing the new world communication order at the national, legal, ethical, technical, and financial levels. The recommendations also address the need to eliminate language barriers and the need for a new concept of freedom of expression. (RL)

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# A NEW WORLD INFORMATION ORDER

# FOR BETTER HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

Prepared for the 1980 Annual Conference of the

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# A NEW WORLD INFORMATION ORDER FOR BETTER HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

A few months ago the Director-General of UNESCO received a bulky report which the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems had taken two years to prepare. This Commission had been set up in 1977, after the 19th General Conference of UNESCO, to study international information and communication problems.

The Commission, made up of 16 persons who differ in nationality, training and ideology, recognized the need to strive for a greater rapprochement among countries and peoples, despite divided opinions on many aspects of the question, since it was felt that this fundamental objective and this legitimate aspiration could be achieved only through the establishment of a new world communication order or the development of better international understanding.

The Commission's opinion stemmed from the fact that information and communication are essential to international relations in all fields. It is precisely in a new world order that the necessary alternative solutions for today and tomorrow must be sought.

Scarcely two years ago, when the representatives of the developing countries called for the establishment of a new world communication order, their colleagues from the North told them they could not support this vague idea since it was ill-defined and lacked an action program to back it. Is it possible to hold the same opinion today? The answer, derived from a great deal of research, is undoubtedly "No".

## 1 DEFINITION OF NEW WORLD INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ORDER

On the basis of the many studies that have tried to define this new order, particularly the Commission's report, what appears to be involved is the establishment of a new, open-ended conceptual framework leading to

a freer, more efficient, more equitable, better balanced international communication system, one founded on democratic principles and favouring equality in the relations between sovereign states.

Moreover, it is important to put an end to disparities and inequalities between developed and developing countries in the area of communication.

The new order would also be the ideal framework for promoting freedom of information and communication as an individual and collective right that must be guaranteed at all levels. There are no grounds for thinking that this would limit freedom of information or hamper the dissemination of information.

It would, above all, allow individuals, communities and nations to make known their aspirations, their concerns and their problems in struggling to shape a better future. This new order would help the cause of liberty and justice, just as it would help to prevent rabble-rousing, end racism, do away with intellectual and ideological hegemony and maintain peace in the world.

The new order must preserve cultural identity and the values of each culture, while promoting knowledge of other cultures and balanced exchanges in the sphere of culture.

To this end, two objectives must be aimed at - the cultural development of peoples and the mutual respect and appreciation of culture in the broadest sense (language, history, cultural heritage, oral traditions, etc) - since we know that intellectual and cultural dependence has as negative an effect as economic dependence.

In this connection the Pope said in his speech of June 2 to UNESCO that the "means of communication cannot be used to dominate others... they must take into account a nation's culture and history... their criterion cannot be interest in the sensational or immediate success, ... but by taking the requirements of ethics into account... they must serve to build a more human life."

That, however, must not prevent them from spreading world-wide an operational culture that communicates complete information on all the aspects, dimensions and requirements of integral human development.

With regard to the fundamental needs of the poorer countries, this new order presupposes a new system of distributing available resources based on a country's entitlement and vital interests.

Changes in the area of communication are thus linked to the conceptual underpinning of the new international economic order. In some respects, development and communication rest on the same principles. In other respects, the new communication order is a prerequisite to the new economic order, just as communication is the sine qua non of all economic exchanges between groups, peoples and nations.

For this reason, to facilitate reasoned discussion at the international level, attention must be focussed first on what is urgent and achievable, without concealing the truth about the political options involved nor the important changes in both national and international communication structures that this new world order implies. In the last analysis this would mean the start of an ongoing process of change in the nature of communication relations at the national, regional and international levels, calling less for academic discussion than for concrete and effective action.

## 2 CONCRETE SOLUTIONS AND ISSUES PENDING

In effect, the practical orientation this new order should take may include measures aimed essentially at reinforcing independence and self-development; preserving cultural identity; encouraging professional integrity and respect for standards; democratizing communications by broadening the public's participation in the decision-making process; favouring international co-operation; and replacing dependency, domination and inequality in the area of communication with interdependence and complementarity based on mutual interest and the equal dignity of nations and peoples.

To put this orientation into concrete form, the Commission made over 80 recommendations in the areas of law, the professions, finance and technology. These recommendations are intended for developing countries, industrialized countries, international institutions and professional organizations.

Although all the recommendations cannot be quoted here, it is possible to mention a few essential points on which debate centred, even though they may not have been definitely adopted by the Commission.

At the national level:

The Commission was of the unanimous opinion that it was up to the developing countries to consolidate their independence; incorporate communication to a greater extent in the development process and preserve their cultural identity; set up and reinforce, at the national level, agencies responsible for formulating overall communication policies so that it would be easier to co-ordinate activities and mobilize the resources needed for this purpose; promote and intensify the endogenous development of the production capabilities of appropriate programs; and generally further the democratization of information, and the circulation of information, without let or hindrance, between cities and rural areas as well as between the country's different regions.

Developing countries must also develop horizontal co-operation among themselves to the greatest extent possible and lend a hand diligently to those among them who need help; self-dependence at the bilateral, regional or inter-regional level has often been considered the touchstone of the new world information and communication order.

Industrialized countries, on their part, are asked, in particular, to make a better effort to understand the concerns of developing countries, and to agree to the sharing of limited natural resources, resources they have been able to enjoy at the expense of developing countries thanks to their advanced technology; they are asked, in short, to give increased attention to the claims of the South and to accept the change that the new world information and communication order necessitates.

These countries should further the exchange of technical and scientific information on the principle that all have equal right to whatever information is legally available.

In these countries the mass media could play a considerable role toward the achievement of this objective by promoting a feeling of solidarity among the countries and making public opinion aware that the interests of the rich and the poor countries are interdependent and that this interdependence of interests guarantees the security of the developed countries.

For their part, international organizations, which are often considered the obvious framework for the development of multilateral co-operation, must co-ordinate their efforts, mobilize resources, provide developing countries with more extensive aid, diversify their aid and acquire the means needed to achieve this objective.

In approving the international development strategy, the United Nations should consider the area of communication as an integral part of this strategy. It must consequently acquire broadcasting facilities and communication satellites so that it can transmit its message more effectively to all the peoples of the world and further progress, comprehension and international understanding.

LANGUAGES OF COMMUNICATION

As international understanding in particular is involved, there is an urgent need to examine the language problem at the national, regional and international levels. In effect, the predominance of a small number of so-called "world" languages, used in communication by more and more powerful media, is a threat to the interdependence and cultural development of many countries.

We cannot ignore the existence of over 500 written languages, sixteen of which are spoken by more than 50 million people. Neither can we lose sight of the fact that three-quarters of the planet's population do not speak any of the main international languages (English, French, Russian), whereas the great majority of documents and papers are published in these languages.

In any case, better international understanding and greater circulation of scientific information is a major concern that calls for concerted action by experts in international affairs to find sensible, effective and economical instruments for meeting the challenge at the linguistic level.

Although the Commission recognized that language barriers and the great imbalance in the use of the international languages created serious problems, it was unable to reach general agreement on a concrete solution, and some of its members merely recommended that studies be undertaken to find means of improving the situation.

AT THE LEGAL AND ETHICAL LEVELS

At the legal level, the Commission recognized the need to define specifically the right to freely circulated information and communication in the areas of consumption and production. This right to communication must be considered as everyone's fully recognized right - a right of which no one must be deprived, whatever the considerations.

This human right, the protection of which is one of the most important tasks of the information bodies, could not exist without freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of information. Therefore instituting the right to communication means recognizing these principles in their application both to the individual and to the community.

Moreover, - and there is no doubt of its urgency - the Commission felt that information professionals should be asked to draw up a code of ethics governing the conduct of all communicators. Measures must also be enacted to ensure the protection of journalists, particularly when on dangerous missions; explain when recourse may be had to the right of response and the correction of misstatements; and require that the events be reported in their real

context. These objectives can be reached only by carefully examining the existing laws and regulations in order to reduce limitations, secrecy clauses and various restrictions on information practices.

Nevertheless, unanimity could not be obtained on the question of further broadening this concept and recommending that the profession draw up an international code of ethics for the press and another for advertising; nor was there unanimity on whether to amend a large number of international agreements and legal documents which are directly or indirectly related to information and the media and which are more or less outdated.

In the first phase, the Commission merely proposed the voluntary application of international provisions to current journalistic practices and national legal structures.

Finally, the Commission recognized the need to limit the process of concentration and monopolization and the need to limit the action of trans-national companies to ensure that they conform to the conditions prescribed by national development legislation and policies. Any reservations in this connection were meant to overcome ideological prejudices.

AT THE TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL LEVEL

At the technical level, injustices will continue unless the existing international communication network is re-examined, tariffs between developing countries are reduced and an end is made to the practice of forcing the small countries to put up with higher taxes and costs than those developed countries are required to pay. It would also be advisable to review the way the frequency spectrum is distributed, as it is not normal to assign nine-tenths of the spectrum to one-tenth of the world's population, thus leaving the great majority without the means to make themselves heard.

In April 1980, an Intergovernmental Conferences organized by UNESCO considered the various technical and financial aspects of the matter. It recommended to the 21st General Conference of UNESCO, which will be held in Belgrade in September, the setting up of an international agency for the development of communication.

The objectives of this UNESCO agency would be to mobilize resources in order to assist developing countries; to advise developing countries on how to gain access to modern technology in the field of information and communication; and to provide the links with regional [illegible]s whose gradual creation should be planned in order to complement and facilitate the performance of the central agency.

This agency, whose creation was unanimously recommended by the Conference participants, could be a providential instrument that would contribute greatly to shaping a new world information order by enabling countries to obtain the technical assistance and funds they need to meet their unlimited needs.

In the opinion of some, the funds urgently needed could not amount to less than $20 billion (American).

Would it then be possible to meet the expectations of the developing countries through the voluntary funding of the planned financial system or must we look for other possibilities? The Commission views on this question were also divided. Some members felt it was necessary to find new resources to benefit developing countries - for example, excess profits from the exploitation of raw materials; an international levy on the use of the electromagnetic spectrum and of the geo-stationary satellite; or an international deduction on the profits of the multinationals.

Nevertheless, despite widely divergent views, there is reason to be optimistic considering the agreements reached on essential points and the awareness which is developing - a good sign of better understanding and a willingness to help achieve all phases of the new world information order, since its achievement depends on a world-wide consensus and on the seriousness and realistic thinking of all the partners in the vast world of information.

Democratic bases and a new concept of freedom of expression

A new world information order, as we imagine it, must be based on democratic principles and on a system that guarantees equality in the exchange of information between developing and industrialized countries. There is no

reason to believe that freedom of information would thereby be restricted. On the contrary, the new order must, in a spirit of justice and equity, accept this freedom as a benefit to all countries whether developed or developing.

But as we see it, freedom of information and communication can have no meaning if certain conditions are not met; hence certain controls for the purpose of regularizing, not restricting, must be introduced if we wish freedom of information and communication to apply truly to all and serve humanity as a whole.

"... between the weak and the strong, it is freedom which oppresses and the law which frees", the Christian philosopher Lacordaire wrote in the 19th Century.

In fact, in the liberal philosophy of the 19th Century freedom of action and enterprise became the most precious value both in the world of business and ideologically; but at whose expense success was obtained in the world of business no one ever asked. The state gave each one the opportunity to engage in business, but it took no responsibility for the consequences. Thus, the freedom of the strong was assured while the weak lost ground in spite of their so-called freedom. "Freedom of speech has also become in practice the freedom of the rich". President Kekkonen of Finland spoke along similar lines in May 1973 at a symposium on the international distribution of television programs (Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, No 70 UNESCO).

As far as I am concerned, I would like to add that, since the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of liberalism in the economic field with its well-known formula of laisser faire, which encouraged people to act as they pleased even to the detriment of a concerted economy, has clearly changed to a new concept based on interference with so many activities that cohesive community action and joint efforts in the general interest are necessary. Thus micro-economics has stopped ignoring macro-economics.

It is therefore justifiable to wonder, as we approach the end of this century, whether the time is ripe for a new concept of freedom of expression; to wonder whether in the areas of information and communication, it is possible to go - either in our thinking or in the action we take - from the micro-dimensional stage whose centre of gravity is the individual to the macro-dimensional stage which is concerned with man in relation to his entire group, with freedom of expression, information and communication working for the benefit of all groups.

In the same connection, Mr Jean Pronck, a Dutch economist, legislator and former Minister of Co-operation, in a study submitted to the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems of which he was a member, wrote in effect that a review of the existing structures of the international information market had shown that the information market was neither freer nor more competitive than the petroleum market, for example. He added that if we really want greater freedom of information, we must assist the peoples of the Third World to rely collectively on their own strength in this field.

There can be freedom of information only if those who are in a weak position in the information market are placed in a position to produce, distribute and consume information by market mechanisms other than prices.

You will agee with me that, in calling for a new world economic order, the Third World countries are not recommending national economic self-sufficiency and do not want the economic strangulation of their countries. The same applies to the new world information order: its sponsors are not seeking to stifle the voice of their peoples or to reduce their means of communication. Certain voices were recently raised in condemnation of government intervention in the area of mass communications when representatives of Third World countries proceeded to denounce the abusive behaviour of certain major news media. This, it should be noted, is a complex subject, and when these representatives call for a change in the established order, they are not necessarily expressing a strictly governmental defence reflex; they are really only adding their voices to those of the people, institutions and elite of their countries.

In fact, it is perhaps useful to mention that in many developing countries, the problem is not only one of freedom of expression; it is also one of knowing how to express oneself, knowing how to assimilate ideas and being able to express them as clearly as possible. For this reason, the journalist in the Third World countries has an extremely important job, as it is up to him to inform and train. In this case, what is involved is the social function of providing information and education.

Beyond that function, the role of the mass media in general is a determinant of economic development, in view of the interdependence that is becoming increasingly obvious; the terms "information" and "development" can no longer be separated either at the national or international level.

Certain sceptics do not hesitate to show their pessimism; they doubt that the intensive circulation of information can make a true contribution to development.

To these people, it is easy to reply that a therapy may have side-effects, but what counts most is the final outcome. Moreover, is the prolonged refusal of the authorities in Southern Africa to introduce television in their countries - for fear of promoting the integration of the two communities - not a weighty argument in favour of the communication media and their contribution to economic development and social advancement?

Once the process has begun, it will not be simple and changes cannot be made fast. The essential point is to accustom opinion to the need for change and let people's minds absorb the idea. It is also essential to persuade world opinion that the problems are global, that the world because of its diversity is an interdependent universe, that there is basic solidarity among men and that solutions through conciliation serve the interests of all. This is a very ambitious cause which involves mobilization of all conscientious persons.